

Schools lead the way with textbooks

Move puts MoCo at the forefront of the nationwide textbook controversy

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Montgomery County Public Schools will be paid \$2.25 million to develop an elementary-school curriculum with a textbook company Pearson that will be copied, produced and sold around the world.

The deal, which was approved by the Board of Education Tuesday night in a 6-2 vote, is one of a kind in size and scope. The school system will also receive a small percentage of the sales revenue once the curriculum is sold worldwide.

Pearson, the world's largest educational publisher, will be able to use the school system's name and some of its top employees as salespeople after the completion of the curriculum. The company will hold the copyrights to the materials and help develop the program's tests.

"I'm looking at it from the standpoint that we are broke," Superintendent of Schools Jerry Weast said. "You have to have new ways of doing things when you don't have money."

Weast said Tuesday that the advance revenue will allow the school system to double the number of staff members who have been working on the curriculum already. The school system has been independently developing the curriculum for months and hoped to complete it in 2015; now, Weast said it will be completed by the 2012-2013 school year. The particular program gives more attention to subjects that have been considered non-core subjects in the past, like social studies, art and writing.

MCPS teachers will open their classrooms to prospective customers from other school districts worldwide and will even speak on behalf of the program at Pearson's request. The school system will receive royalties of up to 3 percent of the curriculum's sales and the additional \$2.25 million advance regardless of sales.

"What Montgomery County Public Schools has accomplished for its students over the last 10 years is inspirational for the rest of the nation," Pearson Chief Executive Marjorie Scardino said in a statement released Tuesday. The education board voted on the decision just following the approval of a budget that cuts spending by 4.4 percent, or by \$97 million, over the next school year. The vote means class sizes will include an extra student across the board, and more than 200 teaching positions will be eliminated. According to Weast, though the school system will continue with these measures, the extra revenue could prevent the elimination of some art, music and athletic programs that were on the chopping block.

The terms of the contract will be discussed over the weekend and could be approved early next week, according to Weast. This could enable MCPS to hire employees to work on the program for the beginning of the next fiscal year which begins July 1.